

So far as work went, they began as they meant to go on, and did go on. Their standard of work is tremendous; for forty years they have worked with a passion and at a pace that is a standing reproach to slackness, and influences, to some degree, everyone who comes in contact with them. In this, there is no change between 1892 and 1932. But, as time went on, the portion of their non-working time devoted to a thoroughly planned sociability sensibly increased. Thus, if many of their later visitors would be hard put to it to give any picture, however rough, of the first-floor drawing-room, that is because it was apt to be too full of people for any of its non-human features to be discerned, and of people so varied and often so remarkable that no other impression but of them, and of the noise they made, could be registered. People met each other there who had never met before and often never met again. From some point of view, or for some purpose, they were, at the moment, "key people", some of them might be, to all appearance, unimportant others were visibly terribly important, there they all were. Everybody who is anybody in any of the multitudinous worlds that make up London, with the possible exception of the merely social, has been to the Webbs, at some time or other. Mrs Webb, says Mr Wells, in that portrait which would be so much more brilliant if it were more accurate and less malicious,

"got together all sorts of interesting people in or
about the public
service, she mixed the obscurely efficient with the
ill-instructed
famous and the rudderless rich, got together in
one room more
of the factors in our strange jumble of a public life
than had ever
easily met before She fed them with a shameless
austerity that
kept the conversation brilliant, on a soup, a plain
fish, and mut-
ton or boiled fowl and milk pudding, with nothing
to drink but
whisky and soda, and hot and cold water, and milk
and lemon-
ade Everybody was very glad indeed to come to
that "